

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

Tobacco and Nicotine Facts



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Tobacco is a plant grown for its leaves. The leaves are dried and crushed before they are put in tobacco products.

Tobacco has a lot of chemicals that can hurt your body. One major chemical is called nicotine.

Nicotine excites the parts of the brain that make you feel good. It quickly gives you a small rush of pleasure and energy. But it soon goes away. This makes you want to use more. Sometimes nicotine can make you nervous and jittery.

People can smoke, chew, or sniff tobacco.

People can smoke tobacco with:

- cigarettes
- cigars
- pipes
- hookahs (water pipes)

People can chew tobacco with:

- chewing tobacco
- snuff
- dip
- snus

People can sniff tobacco a product called snuff, which is put in the nose and sniffed.

People can also vape nicotine with e-cigarettes or vaporizers. You can learn more about these products in our [E-Cigarette Facts](#).

Some slang names for cigarettes are:

- smokes
- cancer sticks
- coffin nails

Some slang names for chewing tobacco and snuff are:

- chew
- wad
- dip

NEXT: [Signs of Vaping, Tobacco, or Nicotine Use](#)



Nicotine or Tobacco Use

Photo by ©istock.com/

[Wavebreakmedia](#) People who smoke tobacco might get a cough that won't go away.

Nicotine is the chemical in tobacco that makes you feel good. It can also raise your blood pressure. Your heart might beat faster. You might breathe faster. And it can make you not want to eat.

People who smoke or vape might get a cough that won't go away.

People who smoke cigarettes will usually have hair, clothes, and breath that smell like cigarettes. Vaping does not leave behind the smell of tobacco, which makes it easier to hide it from parents and teachers.

People who chew tobacco tend to spit a lot.

People often sneeze when they inhale snuff.

NEXT: [Effects of Vaping, Nicotine and Tobacco on Brains and Bodies](#)

Effects of Vaping, Nicotine, and Tobacco



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If a pregnant woman uses tobacco, her baby might be born too early or too small. This can cause health problems for the baby.

These are just some of the problems tobacco and nicotine can cause:

Lung Diseases

Vaping is new, so we don't have enough research to know all the effects on the body, but many of the effects on the lungs will be the same as regular smoking. In fact, the government has reported thousands of lung illnesses and dozens of deaths of people who have vaped nicotine, marijuana or both. Human lungs are not designed to filter some of the oil in these products, and the exact causes of the illnesses are being studied. The government warns against using any vaping products with marijuana, or any that are made at home or on the street. You can find more information [here](#).

Regular cigarette smoking causes lung cancer. It can also cause painful breathing diseases like emphysema. These diseases can happen to people who smoke. People who breathe in other people's smoke can also get these diseases.

Bad Breath, Bad Teeth, Mouth Cancer

Cigarettes and other kinds of tobacco stain teeth and cause bad breath. Chewing tobacco can make teeth fall out and lead to cancer of the mouth. Vaping does not leave behind the brown stains on the teeth, but we don't yet know how it affects the mouth after year of use.

Heart and Blood Problems

If you smoke, you're more likely to have a heart attack or stroke ("brain attack").

Health Problems for Babies

If a pregnant woman smokes, her baby might be born too early or too small. This can cause health problems for the baby.

Health Problems for Teens

The teen years are important for brain growth. Your brain grows until you are about 25 years old. When you inhale smoke, the nicotine makes its way to the brain, and using nicotine products can change the way the brain grows.

Nicotine Poisoning

Nicotine poisoning often happens when young children chew nicotine gum or patches that people use to quit. Or they might swallow [e-cigarette](#) liquid that contains nicotine.

Signs of a nicotine poisoning are:

- having trouble breathing
- throwing up

- fainting
- headache
- heart beating really fast or really slowly

If a child has any of these signs after eating or drinking nicotine, you should call 911 right away.

Addiction

You can become addicted to nicotine just like other drugs—from vaping, smoking, or chewing tobacco (snuff). When you smoke, the nicotine quickly gives you a small rush of pleasure and energy. But it soon goes away. This makes you want to use the nicotine product again and again throughout the day.

Over time, nicotine can change the way your brain works. If you stop using it, your body can get confused and you can start to feel really sick. This makes it hard to stop. This is called addiction.

People who are trying to stop nicotine use might:

- be cranky
- have problems paying attention
- have trouble sleeping
- eat more
- crave nicotine

Fortunately, there are many ways to quit smoking or using other tobacco products. Some examples are:

- counseling
- nicotine replacement therapy, like chewing gum and patches
- medicines

Some people think that using e-cigarettes will help them quit smoking regular cigarettes, but there is no proof that e-cigarettes help people stop smoking. Also, studies have shown that teens who use e-cigarettes are likely to start smoking cigarettes in the future.

The phone number 1-800-QUIT-NOW will connect you with people that can help you quit.

Here is some [online information](#) on how to stop vaping.